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# Interview of Joseph Grabenstein, F.S.C., M.A., M.Ed., M.L.S.

Joseph Grabenstein, F.S.C.  
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## **FIELD NOTES**

**Interviewee:** Brother Joseph Grabenstein

**Interviewer:** Wesley Schwenk

**Interview Date:** February 27, 2013 and March 12, 2013

**Interview Location:** Christian Brothers' Chapel and Christian Brothers' Residence, La Salle University, 1900 West Olney Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19141.

### **The Interviewee:**

Joseph Grabenstein was born on January 6, 1950 to Herman and Irene Grabenstein and lived out his childhood in Cumberland, Maryland. He received his early education from St. Peter and Paul Parish School, then attended La Salle High School for two years, and then the school became co-educational as Bishop Walsh High School. After graduating in 1968, he decided to become a member of the Christian Brothers and entered the novitiate in Ammendale, Maryland a mere seven days after graduation. After one year of training he attended La Salle College, where he resided in Elkins Park with his fellow Scholastics. Grabenstein graduated in 1973 with a Bachelor's Degree in History. He began teaching history at Calvert Hall College High School in Towson, Maryland, then went to St. John's College High School in Chevy Chase, D.C., and then to Bishop Walsh High School in Cumberland, Maryland. During his teaching career he obtained a Master's Degree in History from Villanova University, a Master's Degree in Education from Duquesne University, and his Master's Degree in Library Science from the University of Maryland-College Park. He returned to La Salle University to become Assistant Archivist in 1992 and became the Head Archivist in 1994. He also undertook the responsibility of becoming the archivist for the Brothers of the Christian Schools handling the records of the District of Eastern North America, more commonly referred to as the Baltimore District.

### **The Interviewer:**

I, Wesley Schwenk (b. 1988 in Hershey, PA), grew up in Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania and graduated in 2006 from Schuylkill Haven Area High School. I earned a Bachelor of Arts in History from The Pennsylvania State University in 2010, and am currently seeking a Master's Degree in History concentrating in Public History from La Salle University in Philadelphia. I have interned and volunteered at the Schuylkill County Historical Society, and am working part-time with the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board.

### **Background:**

This interview will be utilized as part of an assignment for History 650: Oral History Theory and Practice for La Salle University. It was also a decision to interview Brother Joseph

Grabenstein because of his broad knowledge of the University and his ties to the institution as well. Another aspect was that as an archivist and keeper of all things La Salle, who better to reflect on the Sesquicentennial than an individual who loves history, is a man who was once a student, and has become a fixture at La Salle University. I began to conduct preliminary research about Brother Joe through a series of e-mails. He provided me with a few items to get me started and I continued on with a great deal of biographical research through the utilization of the internet, as well as gathering information from digital archived material, such as the La Salle Collegian and the Philadelphia Inquirer. Upon further conversations with Brother Joe, it was decided to accommodate his busy schedule we would split our interview process into two separate sessions. This would allow him ample time for his duties and would allow me to reflect on the interview sessions, ask crucial questions, and discover who Brother Joseph Grabenstein really is. He was always accommodating and was truly a remarkable narrator.

### **Description of the Interview:**

The interview took place over two separate sessions separated by spring break. I always arrived approximately fifteen to twenty minutes early for our scheduled one o'clock PM agreement, and Brother Joe displayed a readied vigor that we began almost immediately. On both occasions I met with him at his office in the Archives on the bottom floor of College Hall. He then would walk me through the stairwells and hallways that connect College Hall and the Brothers' Residence, where either we ended up in the sequestered Brothers' Chapel or a sitting room on the first floor of the residence. I felt extremely privileged to be allowed entry into such a building. Both areas were great locations with only minimal interruptions and limited background noise. He had requested that I send him a copy of my tentative questions so he could have an idea of what I was looking for, and he did not script his answers but was very contemplative while speaking. He presented confidence and an earnest tone and was excited to speak about numerous instances. He was very animated in his facial expressions and sometimes utilized his hands while speaking, which made his responses showcase his personality. He is just a friendly and jovial individual and one gets to truly know such a person. Over the extent of the process it is evident that Brother Joe has an inviting personality and is humble and congenial. He has the ability to lighten a mood and entertain anyone willing to listen. We concluded the interview and he usually walked with me to the exit as we spoke of current events and the like. I thanked him and said we would keep in touch. I went in the direction of West Campus and Brother Joe made his way to his task of running the La Salle University Archives. I mentioned that I would e-mail him if I had any further inquiries or detailed explanations that were needed while working on the abstracts. He stated he would be glad to offer any assistance and that he was always just a few keyboard strokes away. This phrase was evident because he is always rather quick and concise with a reply through his University e-mail.

### **Note on recording:**

For my recording purposes, I found it practicable to utilize my Apple iPhone 4. It was easily accessible and records good quality. I utilized a utilities application that is under the category

of Voice Memo. The extent of the built-in microphone is sufficient and I did not find it necessary to utilize an external microphone. In order to retrieve the interview, the iPhone must be plugged into my Dell Inspiron 1721 computer by USB port and recovered utilizing iTunes music software. The process includes syncing and downloading the file to remain in the music library. The memo is stored in *m4a* audio quality but can easily be converted, which I did, to both *wav* and *mp3* formats. I utilized the NCH Express Scribe software to alter the play back of the recording in order to transcribe and abstract. The interview was then played at regular speed in order to edit the final product.

### **Editing the Log:**

My editing decisions included:

- 1) clearly abstracting the material and making accurate decisions what to include in the process
- 2) eliminating false starts and necessary crutch words like “uhm.”
- 3) separating the appearances of run-on sentences, where he uses transitional words such as “and.”
- 4) placing brackets, such as these [ ], to indicate inaudible tones or noises
- 5) positioning pauses and other cues in brackets
- 6) utilizing quotation marks in order to indicate words taken verbatim from the narrator
- 7) utilizing periods and commas in order to be grammatically correct
- 8) provided further explication throughout the footnotes
- 9) placing time stamps as indicators at the appropriate point, whether it be the start of a question or the beginning of a response
- 10) utilizing **bold** typeface to indicate emphasis but title as well